

**William John Horvath
1938 –**

“There are just too many people for the resources.”

-Bill Horvath

Bill Horvath became a conservationist in 1944 at six when he watched a dragline destroy his favorite fishing stream in the name of agricultural production to assist the war effort. He vowed that he would reverse that some day. Thirty-six years later he purchased the property and restored 26 acres of wetland back to its original condition, but the stream was forever gone. "I can still see the dragline at work and it still makes me mad to this day. Wetlands and the fresh water streams they support are absolutely vital to a healthy environment," he said.

The second of five children, Bill left home at the age of nine – the result of a war-time divorce in a rural home without electricity or running water and often without a full stomach. A local dairy farmer a mile and a half away took him in and from that time on work was sun up to sun down seven days a week.

Growing up on the farm though gave him all the experiences he needed with the outdoor world. "I had snakes, turtles, chipmunks, cottontail rabbits, squirrels, crows and a fox at one time or another but only the crows became pets – the rest remained forever wild."

At the age of 13, his eighth grade teacher gave him a catalog for Central State College (now UWSP) encouraging him to pursue a career in conservation. He set his goal to be a conservation warden which evaporated when 140 men applied for the warden position opening.

Following graduation from Stevens Point in 1961, Bill went to graduate school at the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor. There he met federal agency staff getting master's degrees. They encouraged him to take a regional position with the Pennsylvania Soil & Water Conservation position upon graduation. Eighteen months into the job, he was offered the position of Director of the Maryland State Soil & Water Conservation Agency. "At the age of 25, I was way too young and inexperienced to run a state agency with bi-annual budgets, personnel management, state cost-share program and serving as an executive to the board, but some how I got through that," he said.

Twenty-four months later he was offered the same job with the Soil & Water Conservation Board in Wisconsin and served in that capacity for five years.

There he was a strong advocate for watershed management. The State Soil and Water Conservation Board approved all applications for public assistance for watershed management administered by the Soil Conservation Service. The program originally intended to stop the rain drop where it fell, had become a huge channelization program. Horvath stopped that effort in Wisconsin by creating an inter-agency biology team of federal and state agencies to assess potential biological damage. That stopped these projects before they got started and saved a lot of wetland destruction, he recalled.

In 1972, The National Association of Conservation Districts sought him out to be the group's first Midwest Regional Director over eight states. NACD is an umbrella organization for America's roughly 3,000 conservation districts. He retired in 2002 after having served as director of NACD's Policy Center and interim director of its

Conservation Information Technology Center. Three days after retirement, he went back to work for NACD under contract to head up the group's "forestry programs office." He retired a second time in 2005.

He was twice offered the CEO position of NACD, but elected to stay headquartered in Stevens Point rather than return to urban environment of Washington D.C.

During his tenure with NACD he gained a national reputation as a "doer".

For instance, when EPA became an independent agency in the early 1970s, the farming community and NACD avoided any working relationship. He led his Midwest region to the table with EPA resulting in dozens of projects to demonstrate the application of conservation practice on a watershed basis to achieve water quality objectives.

Over the period of 25 years he arranged or received grants from EPA in excess of 15 million. This included a grant to Minnesota and Wisconsin counties bordering Lake Superior to demonstrate erosion control practice.

In addition EPA provided NACD a grant to produce two 28½-minute color films on non-point water quality – the only two ever produced and viewed by more than one million people. One film, "Non point 83" received a national film award. He cooperated with National Geographic, making more than 7,000 feet of film, available for use in its films.

He also directed a national effort to inventory 47 different recreational facilities on private lands in all 3,000 counties. The then Bureau of Outdoor Recreation needed the information to administer the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LAWCON), which made grants to states for purchase and development of recreational land. The information was used for inclusion of state conservation outdoor recreation plans. This was the first and only time a nationwide inventory was taken.

With snowmobile and ATV activity on the rise, conflicts began to occur with private landowners. Bill proposed to the National Wildlife Federation, Wildlife Foundation, National Rifle Association and several other organizations that efforts needed to be made to secure cooperation of private landowners to open their land for private recreation. The biggest obstacle was trespass and liability. He organized a two-year study of trespass and liability with a resulting model act which was sent out to all states for potential passage. When elected to the Wisconsin Assembly in 1983, he sponsored legislation to revise trespass laws and exempt non-platted land from liability when used for recreational purposes. It was the first such act in the country.

Horvath also became involved in the 1982 Farm Bill which authorized resource conservation and development projects. He and a staffer for the Soil Conservation Service, which administered the law, set about to establish project areas. "There was little guidance and rules were non-existence so we just did it". That effort led to resource conservation and development councils across the U.S., including seven in Wisconsin.

As the Soil and Water Conservation program matured in the '80's and early '90's, Horvath took the leadership for NACD to encourage local government to hire staffing to carry out Farm Bill, water quality and state soil and water conservation programs. Eventually that number grew to more than 7,000 employees across the country. He was a frequent speaker at state and regional training sessions. "All conservation does not have to begin at the federal or state level. Local government needs to step forward to play their proper role and we demonstrated it can be done," he recalled of that effort.

Horvath also took his involvement in local government and organization to heart. In 1974, he was elected to the Stevens Point City Council and served for ten years in almost every position including council president. Known as an activist, he spearheaded effort to organize the city's urban forestry program and organized efforts for the city to receive the National Arbor Day Foundation Tree City USA Award. He also took the time to serve as vice president on the State Wisconsin Urban Forestry Council to support those efforts.

He also was a strong advocate of urban planning and land use, serving on the North Central Regional Planning Commission and Stevens Point Planning Commission and chaired the effort to secure a County Planning Department.

In effort to block urban sprawl, he helped organize the revitalization of downtown Stevens Point and served on the Community development Authority which spear headed the efforts. He also chaired a special city committee to create a ¾ mile riverfront park along the Wisconsin River which today serves as a focal point for a multitude of outdoor events.

He was called on by the DNR Board for other services, including its County Forest Advisory Committee and chairing a Landowner- Hunter Council that presented its final report calling for hunter safety training, new trespass and liability legislation and authorizing a private lands wildlife management program. He also led the efforts to transfer the Wild Animal Damage program for DNR to county government administration. Eventually 55 counties would administer this program – previously a hot bed of discontent with the farming community.

Bill was encouraged to seek the post of Secretary of DNR when it was vacated. He and Buzz Besadny, a Conservation Hall of Fame Inductee, were the two finalists for the position. "Buzz got the job, but I was always proud of being, number two on the list. The Board made a good choice." Bill said.

Bill's passion for natural resources extended across the spectrum of resource issues, several of which resulted in new legislation in Wisconsin. One was passage of the group deer hunting law which "to me was common sense since this was the way hunters hunted" he said. The second was the trespass law revision and exemption of liability on private lands. "Private lands have to be a major factor in providing outdoor recreation to its citizens. The state can't do it all," he said.

The third piece of legislation was passage of the original Managed Forest Law (MFL) in 1985. Forty-thousand individuals have taken advantage of this property tax reduction law which at the same time provides outdoor recreation and a continual wood supply for Wisconsin integrated wood industry. "It was a good piece of legislation for the state" he said.

Horvath has continued to serve on special committees and task forces. He was appointed by the Governor to the Wisconsin Forestry Council in 2003 where he chaired a Woody Biomass Task Force. He also is serving the third three year term on the Wisconsin Woodland Owners Association Board of Directors – organization he is a charter member of.

He also served as chair of the League of Conservation Voters Institute during its formative days.

He was the original founder of the Conservation Hall of Fame Foundation for which he served as executive secretary for 21 years. "Some of the inductees I knew personally, so it was always a thrill to see them inducted. Wisconsin has more conservation leaders than any other state, and having the only state Conservation Hall of Fame, always made me proud. It has great educational value to our citizens and active involvement of over 20 state wide conservation organizations. That's a real plus," he said.

He also found time to give back to the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point having served as Alumni Association president and chairing the College of Natural Resources Advisory Council. The Board of Regents also appointed him to a nine-year term on the UWSP Board of Visitors – its advisory board.

Practicing what he preaches, he manages his own 86 acres under the first Forest Stewardship Plan given in the state. While managed for forestry, it also serves as a model for what landowners can do to enhance wildlife habitat. "I've brain-drained foresters, biologists, wildlife managers from all over the nation, so collectively I think I've done about all I can do. But there is always room for one more wood duck or bluebird house and one more wildlife shrubs or tree to be planted. That's the fun part of owning your own land" he said.

An avid hunter, bridge player and golfer he keeps extensive records on each. I'm competitive so I like to see where I can improve which he adds "gets tougher as you get older".

Bill's conservation colleagues attest to his competitiveness but in the final analysis he always puts the resource first. He is passionate about this and as many colleagues will attest, "You always know here he stands."

Resume

NAME Bill Horvath 350 McDill Ave., Stevens Point WI 54481
Telephone: 715-341-4021 email: billhorvath@charter.net

BACKGROUND Born and raised on a dairy farm in Shawano County, WI

EDUCATION B.S. Conservation/English, University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, 1961
M.S. Conservation, University of Michigan-Ann Arbor, 1963

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE Field Representative, PA Soil and Water Conservation Commission, 1962-64
Executive Secretary, MD Soil Conservation Committee, 1964-67
Executive Secretary, WI Soil Conservation Board, 1967-72
Regional Representative, National Association of Conservation Districts, 1972-97
Director, NACD Policy Center, National Association of Conservation Districts, 1997-2001
Director, NACD North Central Programs, 2001-2002
NACD Forestry Specialist 2002-2006

COMMUNITY SERVICE Elected Alderman Stevens Point City Council, 1974-84
Served as Chair, Airport Committee, Personnel Committee, Capital Improvements, and Legislative Committees, and Special Committee to Reorganize Portage County Areawide Planning
Served as President of City Council
Served as Member, Board of Public Works; Community Development Authority; City Plan Commission; and Finance Committee
Served as Chair, City of Stevens Point Transportation Commission, 1980-84
Elected to State Assembly, 1983-84
Served on Environmental Resources; Primary & Secondary Education; Forest Productivity & Rural Development; and Small Business Committee
Appointed Whiting Village Board of Trustees – 2011 Re-elected 2012
Director, UW-SP Alumni Association, 1980-1991, President 1983-85
Director, UW-SP Foundation, 1983-85
Chair, Wisconsin DNR Hunter-Landowner Council, 1982-84
Member, Wisconsin DNR County Forestry Advisory Committee, 1978-1988
Chair, Stevens Point River Front Development Committee, 1981-84 & 1992
Executive Committee Member, Downtown Action Committee, 1979-84
Member, Stevens Point Sewer & Water Commission, 1986-87
Vice-Chair, Portage County Citizens Groundwater Advisory Council, 1984-85; Village of Whiting Representative, 1989-1992
Member, UW-SP Board of Visitors, 1987-2000
Member, Village of Whiting Plan Commission, 1988-94
Member, Chamber of Commerce Community enhancement Committee, 1991-95
Member, DNR Urban & Community Forest Council, 1991-94, Vice Chair 1993-94
Member, DOT Hwy 10 Study Committee, 1991-93
Founder, Executive Secretary and Past Steering Committee Chair, Wisconsin Conservation Hall of Fame, 1980-2005
Member, UW Board of Advocates, 1987-1997
Chair, UW-SP Schmeckle Reserve Committee, 1987
Member, UWSP College of Natural Resources Advisory Council, 1997-2005, Chair 2001-2003
Member, Steering Committee, Plover River Alliance, 1997-2000
Member External Review Panel, Sustainable Forestry Initiative, American Forest and Paper Association, 2001-2006
Charter Member, Wisconsin Woodland Owners Association, elected Board member 2002-2011
Coordinator of WWOA MFL Division 2009-
Chair, Wisconsin League of Conservation Voters Institute, 2003-2004
Member, Wisconsin Forestry Council 2003 -, 2011, Chair Woody Biomass Task Force
Member, NRCS Technical Committee – Sub Committee on Forestry 2005 -

**PROFESSIONAL
AFFILIATIONS
PUBLICATIONS
HONORS, ETC**

Member, Soil Conservation Society of America, WI Chapter
Wild Turkey Federation; Charter Member, Wisconsin
Member of Quality Deer Management Association
Member of National Wildlife Federation
Published series in Maryland Conservationist
Authored Newsletters in Pennsylvania, Maryland and Wisconsin
Authored Article in USDA 1969 Yearbook on Farm Ponds
Authored Publications for Wisconsin SC Board and NACD
Distinguished Service Award, Maryland Association of Forest Conservancy
Districts, 1967
UW Faculty Senate, 1970-72
Outstanding Service Award, Wisconsin SWCD's, 1972
Alumni of the Year, 1974; Environmentalist of the Year, 1985
UW-Stevens Point, College of Natural Resources
NACD Dedicated Service Award, 1978, 1992, 1997, 2003
Wisconsin Legislative Council – Special Recognition 2010-2011
Mayor's Community Service Award, 1984
SCSA Achievement Award, 1985
USFWS Partners in Wildlife Recognition Award, 1993
Wildlife Habitat Award, Shawano County, WI SWCD, and Region, 1996
Wisconsin DNR #1 Forest Stewardship Plan Designation, 1996
US Forest Service – Professional Service Award, 2002
WI Dept. of Agriculture – Bureau of Land & Water Resources – Special Recognition-2002
Indiana Assoc. of Conservation District Employees – Special Service – 2002
Illinois Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts-Special Service Award, 2003
U of WI Stevens Point – Distinguished Service Award - 2003
NACD Forest Resources Committee-Special Recognition for Service 2005
Organizer and part owner for 27 years of the J & H Game Farm, Inc. (A paid hunting and
shooting preserve in Shawano County and sporting clay operation) 1963-1990
Married 50 years (wife-Nancy)
Two children (Tim & Kim)

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